

Λεύκη
(Leuke)

for violoncello

Martin Iddon (2019/20)

Performance instructions

The wolf tone is a sort of interference in the ordinary production of sound, an undesirable intrusion or obstruction to be avoided. *Λεύκη* reverses this perspective: the piece seeks precisely to find, to celebrate the wolf tone and, indeed, asks the 'cellist to tune the 'cello in a way which amplifies the presence of the wolf tone pitch (instructions for undertaking that tuning follow below). However, the piece reverses the conventional view of the wolf tone *in toto*: *Λεύκη* introduces a set of its own interferences which make it increasingly difficult to find, to bring out, to focus the wolf tone. The piece has—or should have—a riddle- or puzzle-like character, which focuses on the search for the wolf tone, in the face of a set of (increasingly challenging) obstacles.

As such, lines from one of the many Anglo-Saxon riddles preserved in the Exeter Book appear above the notation of the score, leading toward the key word, *wulfheafedtreo*, that is 'wolf-head tree', which recalls that wolves were to be feared in medieval Europe, and were caught, killed, and hung from trees, though the word may later have come to connote a gallows. The performer may find it useful to intone these lines silently during a performance or may use them as a sort of performance direction to indicate the character of individual gestures, to act as a guide for the ways in which particular gestures might be shaped. A transcription and translation of the complete riddle—to which a good many difference solutions have been proposed—follows these instructions. Equally, the overcoming of the sequence of challenges *Λεύκη* presents might be viewed as a sort of quest narrative, as obliquely referenced in the quotation from *Beowulf* that heads the piece's programme note.

Poetically speaking, as well as more literally, the piece is concerned with the points at which wolves and wood intersect and interact. The same relationship underpins the piece's title: the nymph *Λεύκη* was named for the white poplar—the leaf of which has one side which is dark green and another which is, distinctively, white—while the Greek word for wolf, *λύκος*, is, because of the whitish hair of the wolf, perhaps derived from the same stem. Further, in forestry, a wolf is a larger, often malformed tree, which would be amongst the first to be thinned out.

To make the performer's task more straightforward, indications regarding finger pressure, bow motion between *sul tasto* and *sul ponticello*, dynamic, and the use of a mute are *desirable* but inessential. They may be, according to the performer's desires, disregarded in whole or in part. In the simplest version of the piece, then, only the material on the staff lines would be attended to, which should make the wolf tone sound clearly and easily. Even in this case, the instruction that the piece should be performed as quietly as possible holds. This should be read quite literally, however: the piece should not be performed at a dynamic quieter than that at which the wolf tones speak, but rather at their very lowest threshold, so they are, *just*, at risk of not speaking. Over time, it may be possible to make this threshold dynamic lower: this, too, is desirable; if 'as quiet as possible' becomes quieter, this new lower level should be taken as the threshold. The fixed media part which accompanies the second half of the piece should be diffused at a dynamic which is directly related to this threshold: neither the 'cello nor fixed media should dominate.

Once the piece has settled such that wolf tones securely sound at a (relatively) quiet dynamic—which may occur during the rehearsal process or after a number of performances—the performer should introduce the motion between *sul tasto* and *sul ponticello*, which is the gentlest of the interferences. This may be undertaken for every gesture or for only some gestures. Once wolf tones sound in this new context, the indicated changes of finger depression should be deployed, which present a greater degree of interference. Again, this may be undertaken across the piece globally or only with respect to certain gestures (though, in both cases, the expectation is that, over time, these indications become increasingly observed rather than disregarded). Similarly, a consistent goal should be to reduce the dynamic as far as is possible, though no further. With this in mind, there is a final, if very significant interference, which is that the piece may be played with a wooden mute. Though a wooden mute is not so extreme as a metal or rubber mute, it may be expected nonetheless to act as a sort of wolf tone attenuator, the additional mass on the bridge changing, if slightly, the reverberant characteristics of the body of the instrument. It is perfectly possible that an individual performer will never reach the point at which the piece can be consistently or securely undertaken with the mute.

Though the score is written in time-space notation, absolute metronomic precision is neither anticipated nor desired, at any rate no more than it might be in the performance of music of the common practice era. If a slight holding back, elongation, or shaping of a given figure makes it possible to bring out the wolf tone more strongly—or more elegantly, gracefully—the performer should feel free to do just this.

In a similar sense, though the score is written using a sort of tablature, it is not, or not quite, the case that mere fidelity to the physical motions indicated will result in the piece, as if by magic, appearing. Or no more so, again, than would be the case for music of the common practice era. The performance may well have the sort of character of tai chi or of dance, which is to say that a quite complex physical choreography is in play, where balances between what is asked in one parameter and what is asked in another have to be negotiated. In truth, what is intended is closer to neumes or, more precisely, cheironomy.

Once it is being observed, the uppermost staff indicates the motion of the bow between *poco sul ponticello* and *poco sul tasto*: importantly, these are not extremes of motion and indicate a gentle shaping of tone. Like the other indications, they should not be read as absolutely prescriptive: a motion may be slightly briefer than the score suggests, or be, for a moment, even less extreme than the already quite narrow bandwidth indicated.

Similarly, two indications for finger depression are given on the second and third string: either the string is to be fully depressed or very slightly released, to about a quarter of harmonic pressure at most. Like other indications, the movement desired occupies a very narrow bandwidth and, like other indications, taking a little longer over a particular motion, should that help to shape the sound, would be wholly acceptable and welcome.

Although these indications are to be taken flexibly—closer to reading traditional notation in this sense than tablature, perhaps—it is also the case that the release of fingers from the string, even if only very slightly and in a narrow pitch range, is likely to result in chaotic, unpredictable sounds, which, too, are wholly welcome.

The first and fourth strings are played either open or at harmonic pressure on particular nodes (or as a trill between the two). Where a harmonic is indicated, a range of partials is offered: any partial within this range is acceptable—though in general, the higher, the better—but once a partial has been selected as a part of an individual gesture, it should not be changed. That is to say, if the third partial is selected for the trill which begins on the first string just before the end of the first minute of the piece, the third partial should be used *throughout* that trill.

The second and third strings are notated using three-line staves. The central line indicates the central point of the wolf tone of the instrument on that string. The upper line indicates the point at which, if one were to undertake a glissando rising in pitch away from the wolf tone, the pitch disturbance introduced by the wolf tone ceases to be perceptible. The lower line indicates the same for a glissando descending in pitch. These strings should be tuned so that the complete range indicated above can comfortably be fingered on both simultaneously. In all likelihood, this will mean that string III retains its usual tuning, while string II is detuned a little to make the stretch comfortable.

The first string should be detuned by approximately a major third to a perfect fourth, so that it is tuned to the wolf tone of the instrument. The fourth string should be detuned by approximately a perfect fifth to a minor sixth, so that it is tuned to the pitch class of the wolf tone, but some two octaves lower. Both strings may occasionally be set into sympathetic vibration by the sounding of the wolf tone on strings two and three. Though this is, under almost all circumstances, likely to be too quiet to be audible, the performer might choose to amplify the instrument with a contact microphone and, thus, bring out these sympathetic resonances.

It is important to note that, by virtue of this detuning, the location of the wolf tone itself will also drop in pitch, so that it will take a little time to find a point at which the tuning settles.

Λεύκη is divided into two panels: *Λεύκη α* and *Λεύκη β*. Each can be performed independently. They can also be performed *attacca* as a single piece, then entitled simply *Λεύκη*. As noted above, *Λεύκη β* features a fixed media part which runs for the duration of the panel. Beyond the fact that the fixed media and performed portions of the panel are of the same duration and must begin and end together, there are no further points of synchronisation within *Λεύκη β*.

'Riddle 53', *The Exeter Book* (before 990 CE)

Ic seah in healle, þær hæleð druncon,
on flet beran feower cynna,
wrætlic wudutreow ond wunden gold,
sinc searobunden, ond seolfres dæl
ond rode tacn, þæs us to roderum up
hlædre rærde, ær he helwara
burg abræce. Ic þæs beames mæg
eaþe for eorlum æþelu secgan;
þær wæs hlin ond acc ond se hearda iw
ond se fealwa holen; frean sindon ealle
nyt ætgædre, naman habbað anne,
wulfheafedtreo, þæt oft wæpen abæd
his mondryhtne, maðm in healle,
goldhilted sword. Nu me þisses gieddes
ondsware ywe, se hine on mede
wordum secgan hu se wudu hatte.

I saw in the hall, where the warriors drink,
Four different types carried onto the floor,
A curious tree and wound gold,
Crafted treasure, and some silver,
And the sign of the cross of He who raised
a ladder for us to the heavens, before he
harrowed the fortress of the hell-dwellers.
I can easily explain to you the quality of the tree:
there was maple and oak and hard yew
and fallow holly; they are all together
useful to the lord, having a single name:
wolf's head tree, which often obtained a weapon
for its lord, treasure in the hall,
gold-hilted sword. Now let whoever has the courage
to put into words what this wood is called
tell me the answer to this riddle.

Programme note

Hie dygel lond
warigeaþ wulfhleoþu windige næssas
frecne fengelad ðær fyrgenstream
under næssa genipu niþer gewited
flod under foldan Nis þæt feor heonon
milgearnearces þæt se mere standeð
ofer þæm hongiað hrinde bearwas,
wudu wyrtum fæst wæter oferhelmað.

Beowulf, lines 1357–64

The nymph *Λεύκη* (*Leuke*) is named for the white poplar, the leaf of which has one side which is a dark green and another which is, distinctively, white. Like Persephone, Leuke was abducted by Hades who, after her death, transformed her into a white poplar, the leaves of which Heracles would later use to crown himself on his return from his twelfth labour, the katabasis during which he rescued Theseus, himself imprisoned in the underworld following his attempt to abduct Persephone. The Greek word for wolf, *λύκος*, is, because of the whitish hair of the wolf, perhaps derived from the same stem, via *λευκός*, which, analogous to the Latin *luce*, means light. Poplar was, too, one of the woods commonly used in the manufacture of Anglo-Saxon shields. The piece, *Λεύκη*, obliquely references this cluster of associations, focussing on the wolf tone (or, for that matter, tones) of the cello, normally carefully guarded against, but here embraced. It is in two panels, *Λεύκη α* and *Λεύκη β*, each of which lasts for seven minutes, and which may be played singly, or as a pair, *attacca*.

The field recordings used in the fixed media part which accompanies *Λεύκη β* were made beneath a white poplar at Homestead Park, York.

Λεύκη was written for Séverine Ballon.

Martin Iddon, York, 18 July 2019

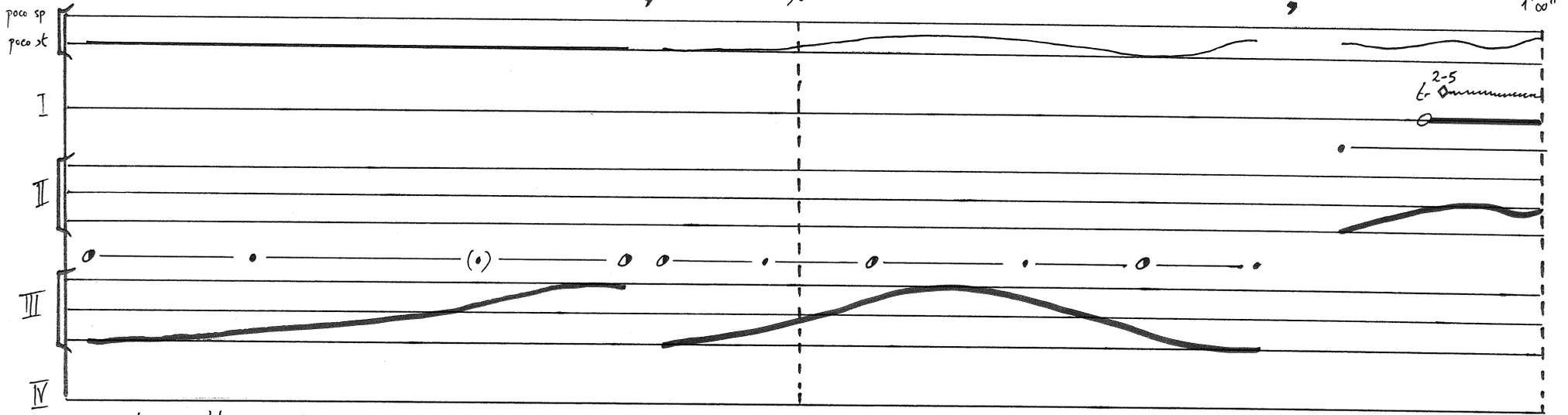
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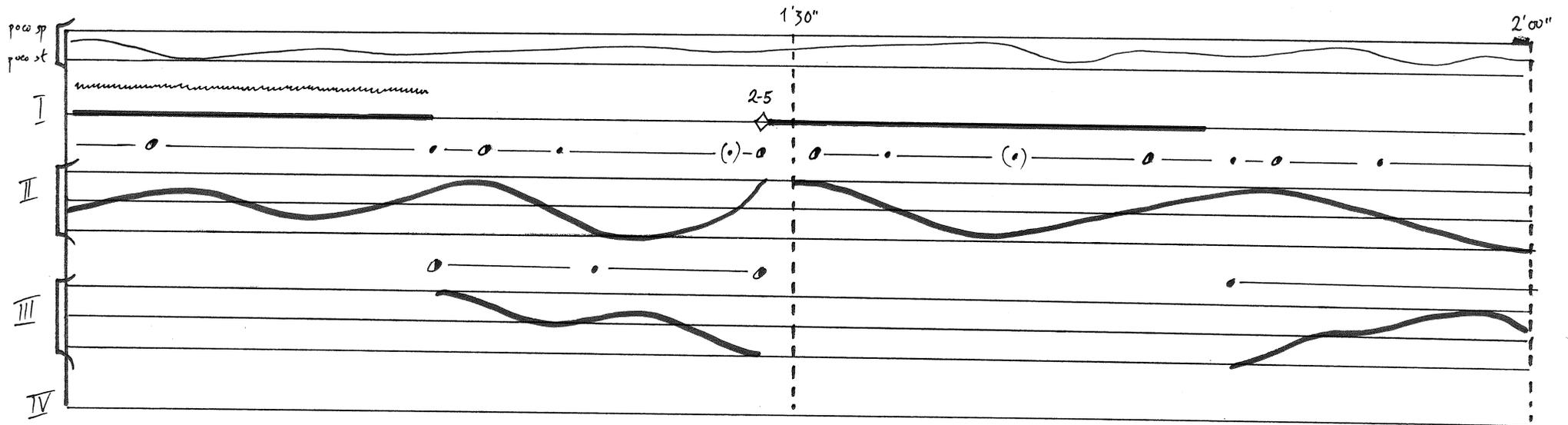
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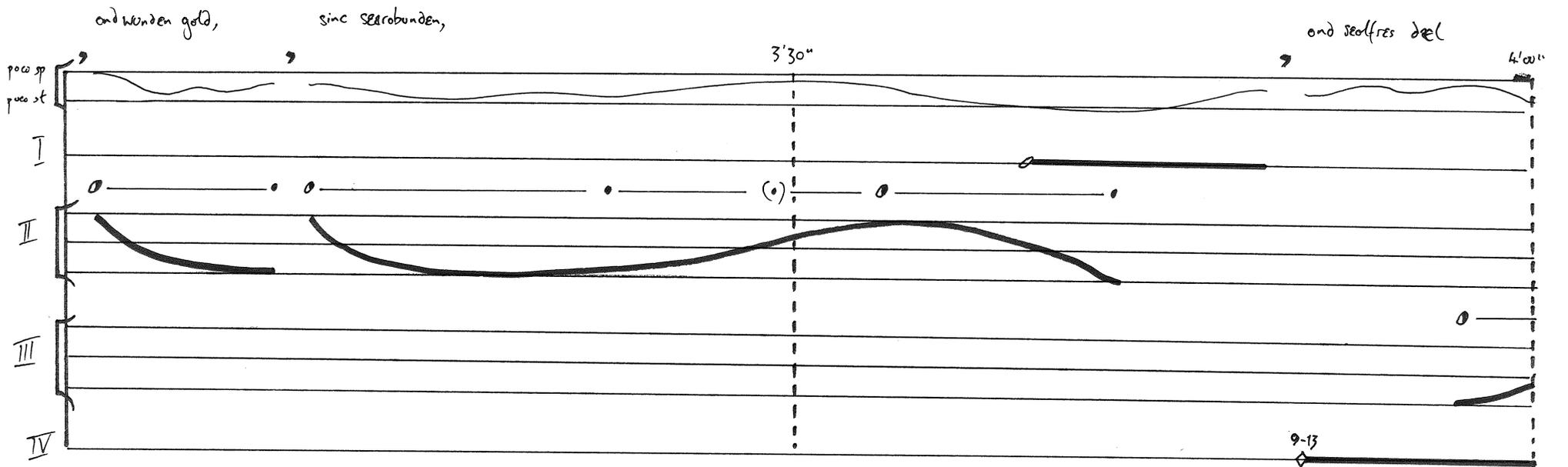
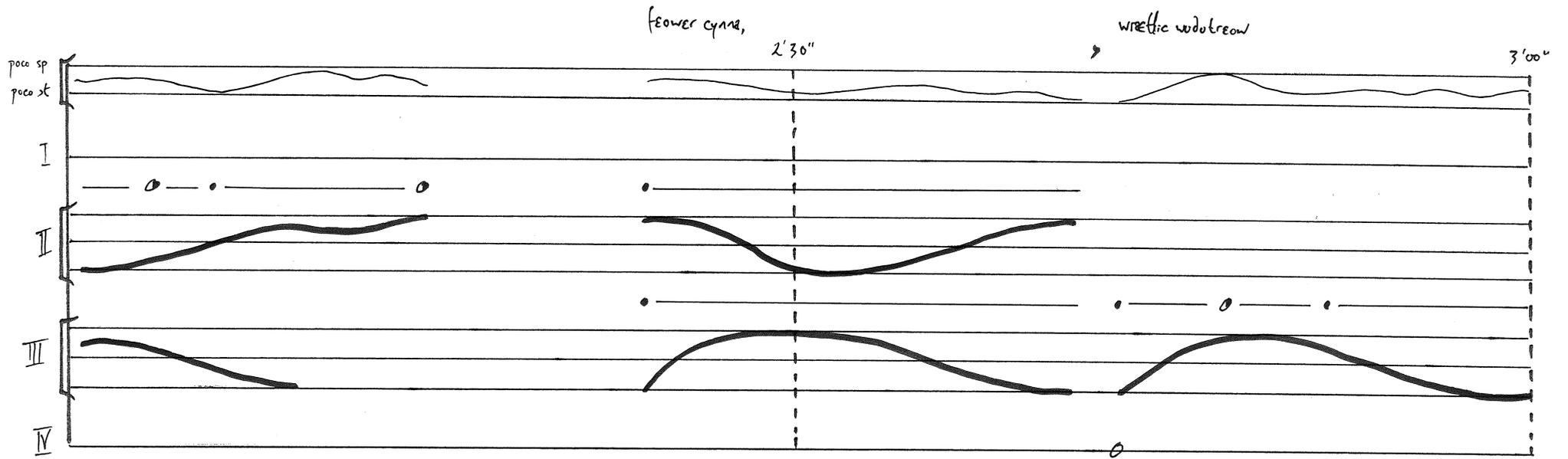
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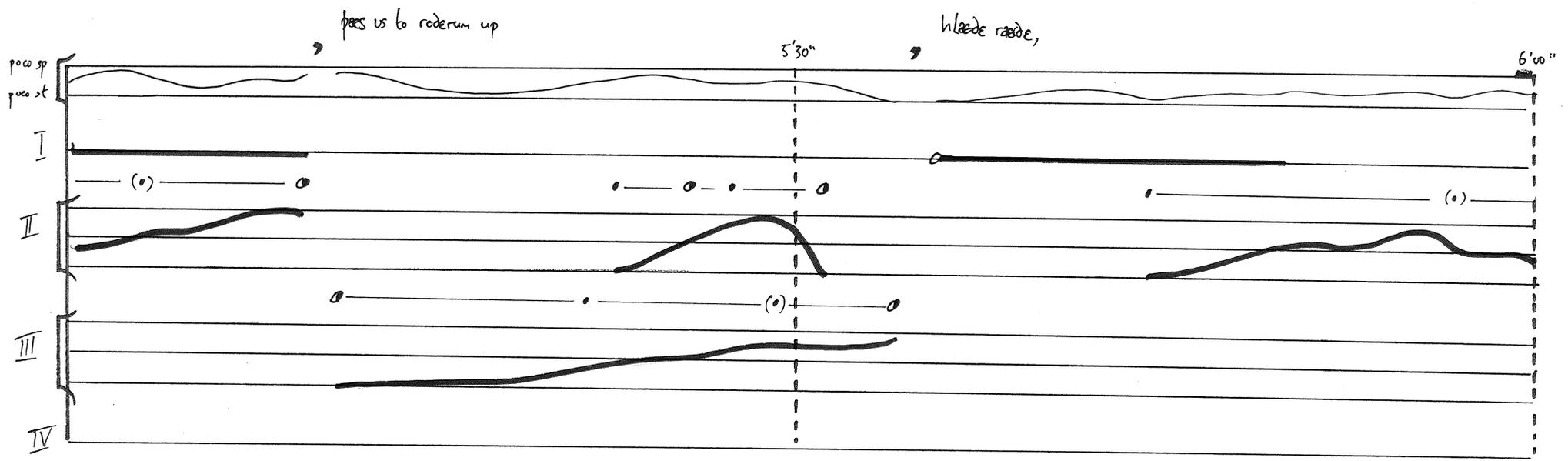
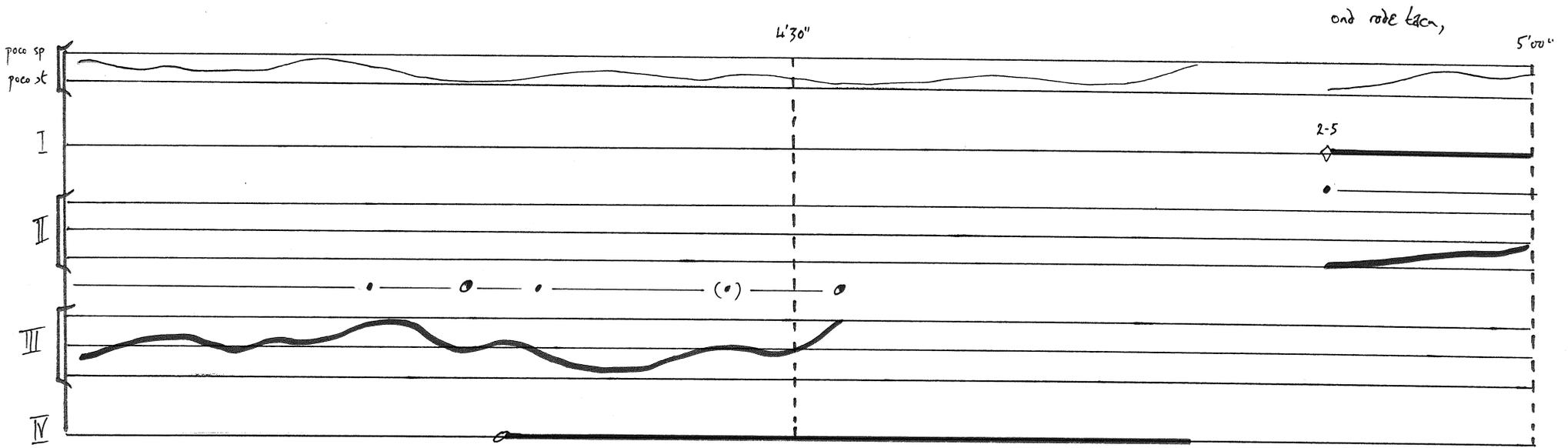
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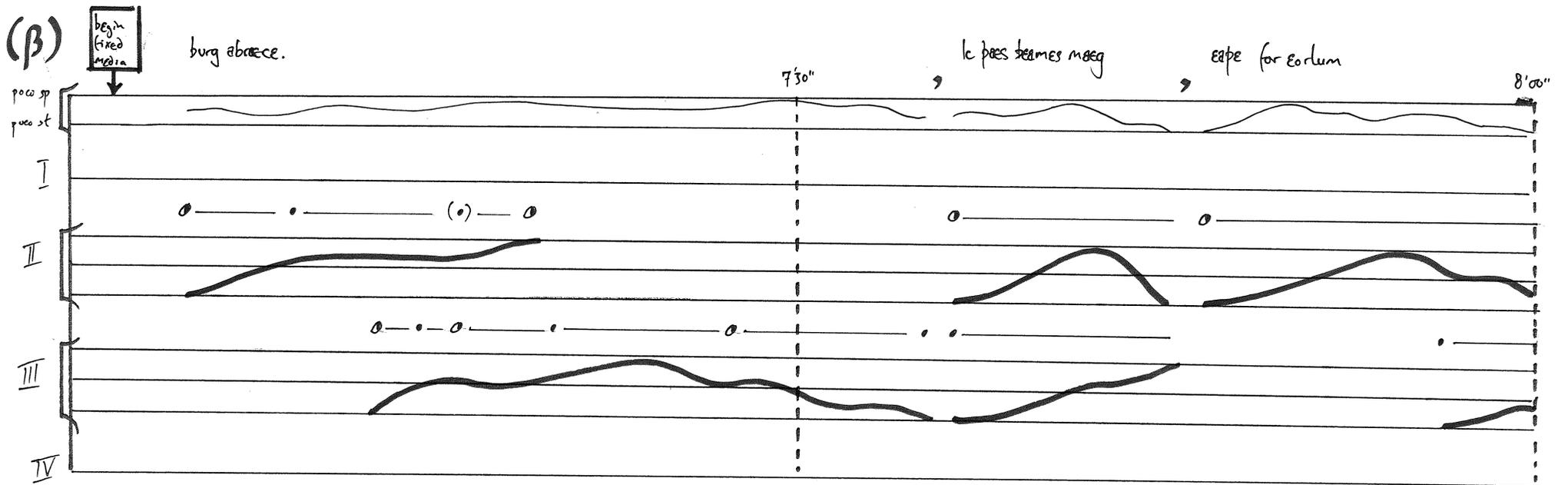
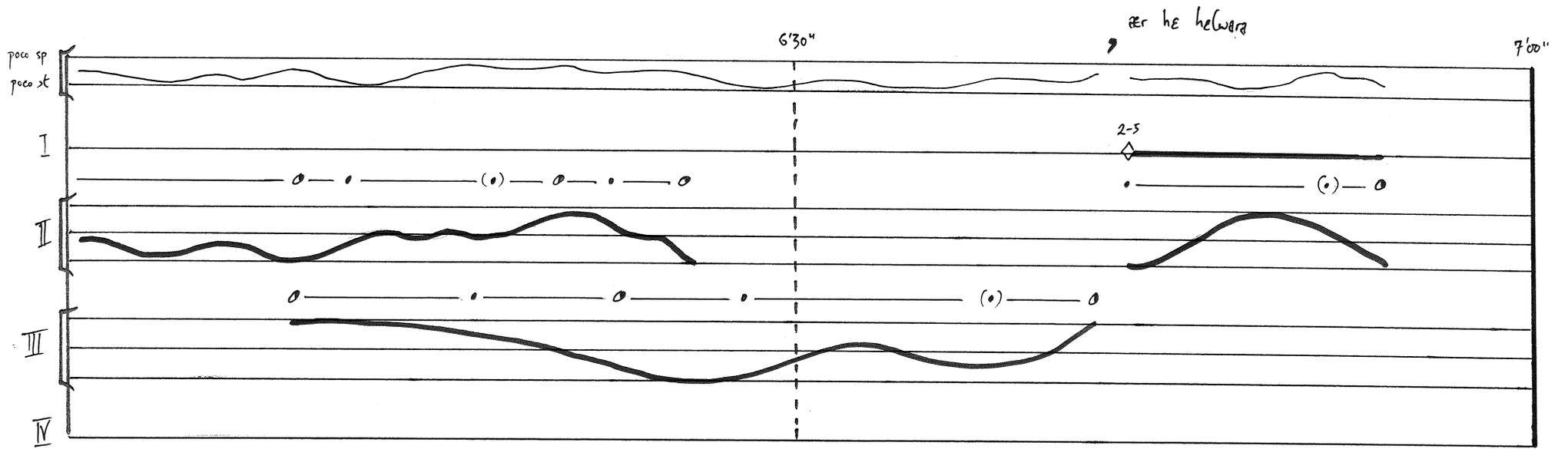


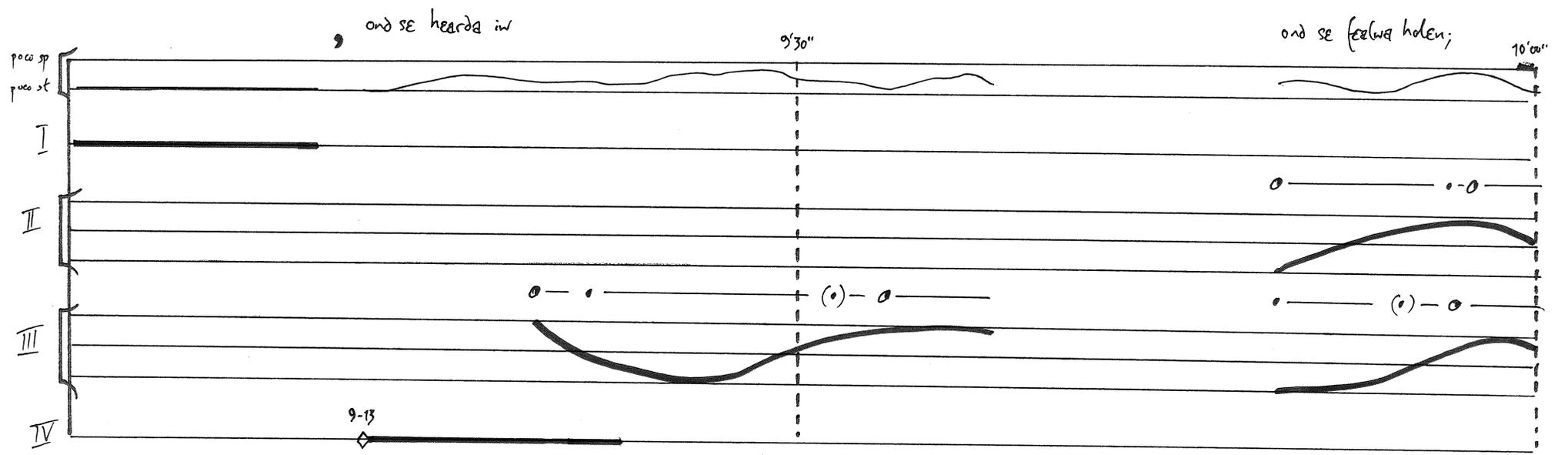
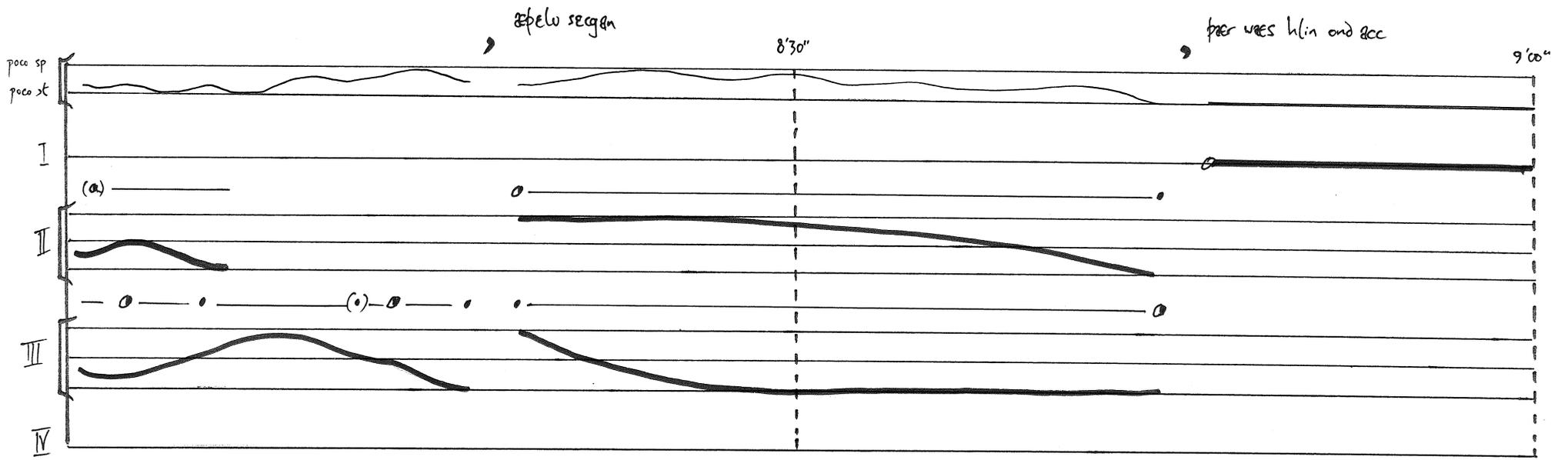
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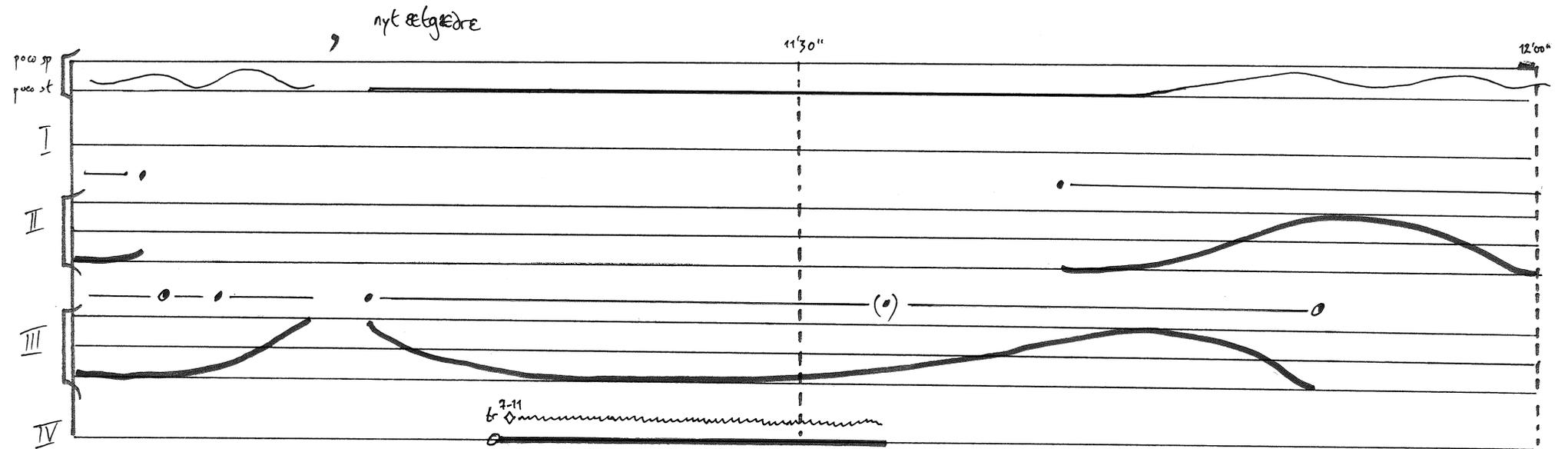
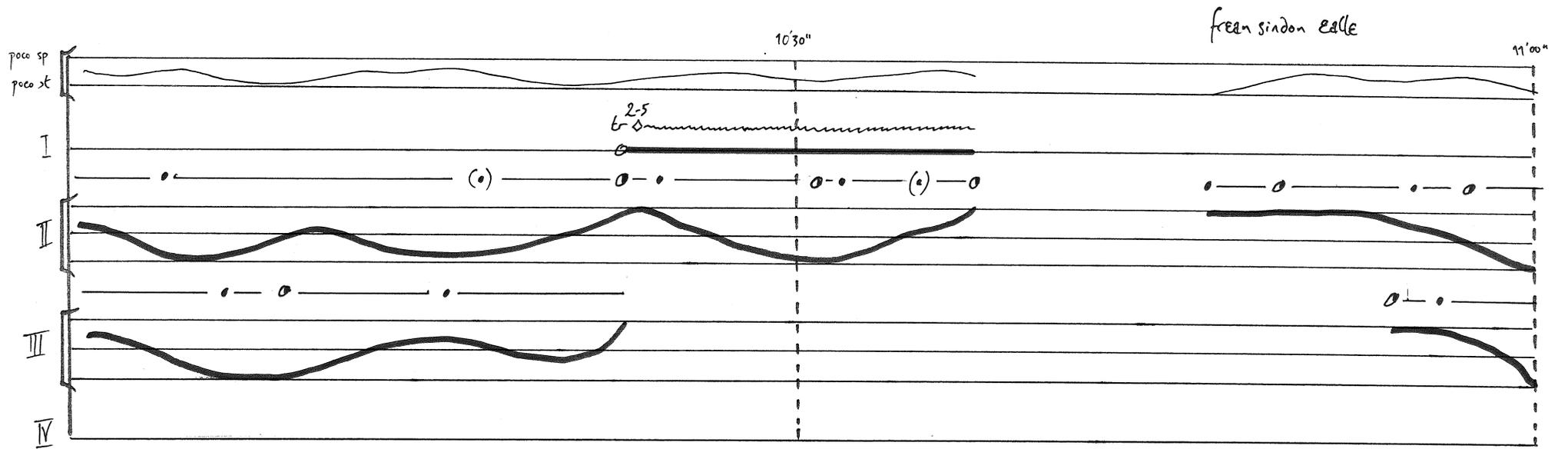


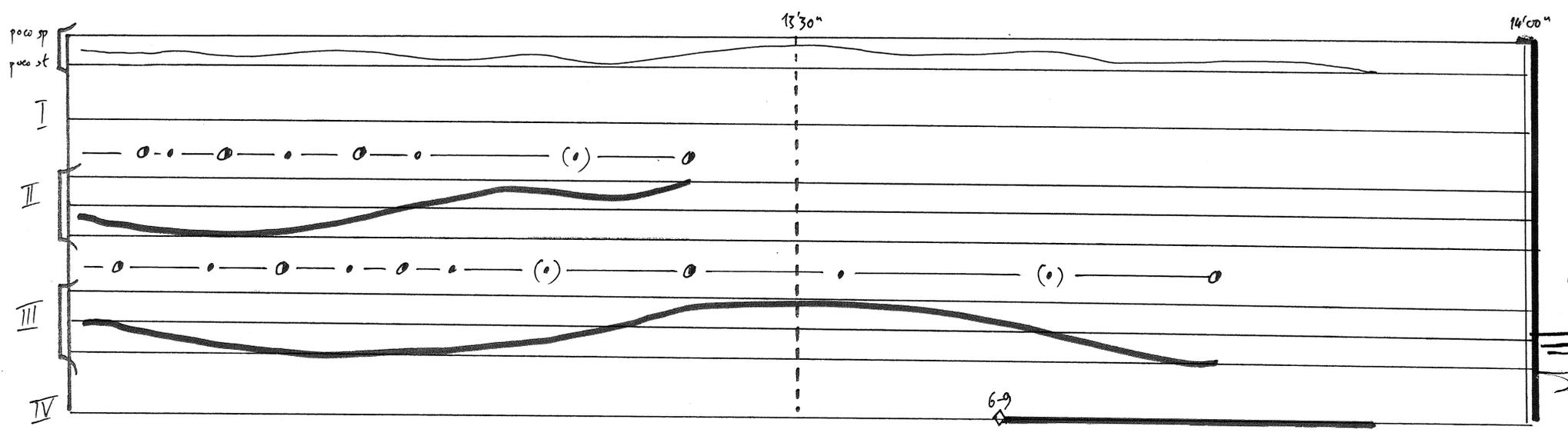
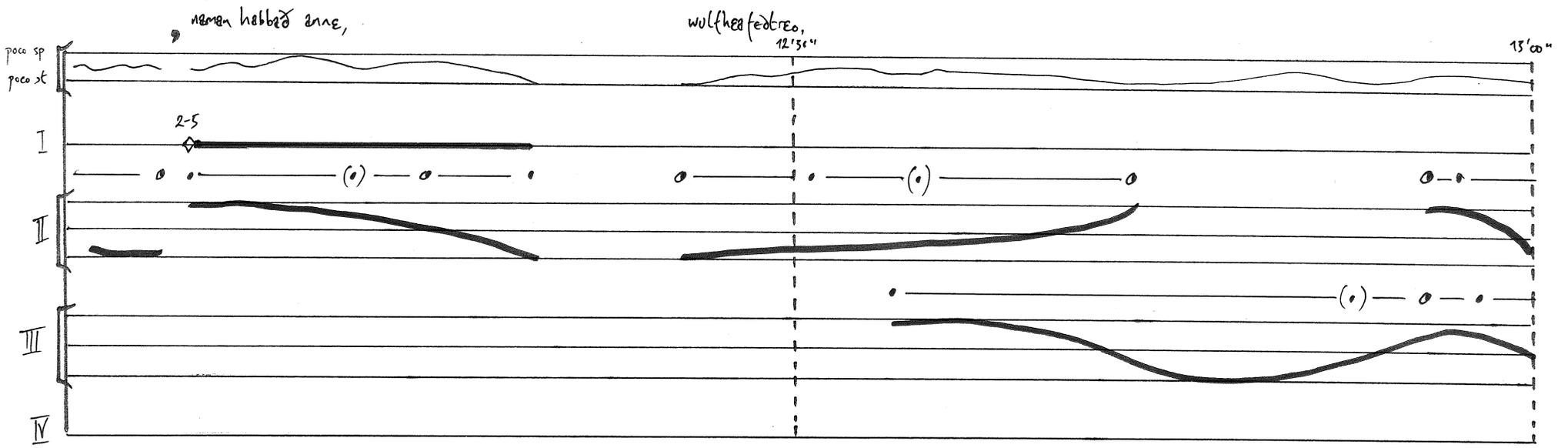












M.W.
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